

Final push at European Parliament for EU copyright reform

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The European Parliament votes Tuesday on controversial copyright reforms championed by news publishers and the music business but criticised by big tech and internet freedom activists.

The run-up to the vote has seen waves of lobbying and protests by both supporters and opponents of the law, which is designed to update European copyright legislation that is now nearly two decades old.

The reform, two years in the making, is loudly backed by media companies and artists, who want to obtain a better return from web platforms—such as YouTube or Facebook—that use their content.

But it is strongly opposed by some of those same internet giants such as YouTube-owner Google, which make huge profits from the advertising generated on content they host, and also by supporters of a free internet who fear it will result in unprecedented restrictions to web freedom.

"The result of the vote is highly uncertain, but we remain confident," said a parliamentary source and backer of the reform.

The final days before the vote were marked by marches and media stunts, including tens of thousands of people protesting in Germany on Saturday under the slogan "Save the Internet".

There were similar protests in Austria, Poland and Portugal, while major Polish newspapers on Monday printed blank front pages in an appeal that MEPs adopt the reform.

Germany is at the heart of the anti-reform movement, led by Julia Reda, a 32-year-old Pirate Party MEP who has spearheaded a campaign against two of the law's provisions that have become flashpoints in the debate.

First is Article 13, which aims to strengthen the bargaining power of rights holders with platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Soundcloud, which use their content.

Under the reform, European law for the first time would hold platforms legally responsible for enforcing copyright, requiring them to check everything that their users post to prevent infringement.

'Neighbouring rights'

Reda and her supporters insist that Article 13 would require platforms to install expensive content filters that would automatically and often erroneously delete content from the web.

Backers of the law, led by its rapporteur MEP Axel Voss, answer that filters are not a requirement but they do not explain how companies can comply with Article 13 without them.

Opponent MEPs are mounting a campaign to see

Article 13 removed from the law in a move that is backed by BEUC, the influential European consumers organisation.

"We fully support the aim of ensuring fair remuneration for creators, but this should not happen to the detriment of consumers. There is a very high risk that the new law will do more harm than good," said Monique Goyens, head of BEUC.

The second article advocates the creation of a "neighbouring right" to copyright for [news media](#).

It should enable news companies to be better paid when their output is used by information aggregators like Google News or social networks such as Facebook.

Major publishers including AFP have pushed for the reform, seeing it as an urgent remedy to safeguard quality journalism and the plummeting earnings of traditional media companies.

But opponents have called it a "link tax" that will stifle discourse on the Internet and pay only big [media companies](#), with no real benefits for journalists or newsgatherers.

The reform is staunchly backed by France and other member states, and the vote in the European Parliament was expected to be a formality.

But the opposition of influential firms such as Google as well as the grassroots movement led by Reda have put that outcome in doubt.

"Copyright is not censorship, it is freedom of creation and diversity of information," the French presidency said in a tweet.

"Without copyright, there is no longer a Europe of innovation and culture."

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